



Regional News

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Water expert warns Colorado River shortages may be inevitable

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BOULDER, Colo. – Water shortages in the Colorado River are almost inevitable by 2011 and could force feuding Western states to cooperate on managing the river, an expert said.

"All the states are at risk," said Jim Lochhead, former executive director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources. "And when all parties are at risk, there is potential for a mutually beneficial (resolution)."

Lochhead spoke Wednesday at a University of Colorado symposium on the river's problems.

A long drought has left Lake Powell and Lake Mead, the river's two major reservoirs, dangerously low. Abundant snow last winter will raise both reservoirs, but not enough to replace what the drought and a booming population have drained.

"We wiped out the bad year of 2004 by having a wet 2005," said Terry Fulp of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. "But there is still an impetus to get some agreement."

The 1922 Colorado River Compact divides the river's water between the Upper Basin states – Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming – and the Lower Basin states – Arizona, California and Nevada. So far, the river has been able to satisfy the demand, but population growth is expected to outstrip the available water, officials said.

The Interior Department has begun writing a drought management plan for the river after the seven states failed to reach an agreement. The plan is expected to be finished by December 2007.

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